

HISTORY OF PEACE RIVER ASSOCIATED LIBRARIES (P.R.A.L.)

1952

The Peace River Co-operative Library (the former name of P.R.A.L.) was formed.

Signatories to the agreement were: Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Pouce Coupe and Tatle Creek (also known as Tomslake).

The Peace River Co-operative Library was initiated by the Public Library Commission (a provincial entity). The intent was for the libraries in the association to commit their own funds for the development of a book pool to be used by the whole group. The Public Library Commission would also commit funds, and would acquire, process and distribute the books to the libraries. In the North, the Public Library Commission located its headquarters in Dawson Creek. (Similar co-operative groups were also set up in the North Central Area [Prince George and surrounding area – 1050] and in the Kootenays [Cranbrook and surrounding area – 1956].

How did it work? Libraries exchanged books between themselves and the Commission branch loaned small collections to each of the libraries.

1956

The name of the association was changed from Peace River Co-operative Library to the Peace River Associated Libraries (P.R.A.L.).

1958

The process of the book pool was changed.

The Commission branch in Dawson Creek became ‘in effect a *member* of the P.R.A.L. to allow the book stock of each to be merged and distributed freely at exchange time. Having one big collection to be shared by the P.R.A.L. and the Commission would simplify acquisition and processing routines, too. The commission (our branch) would deliver books in quantity to each library at exchange time, and each library’s staff and helpers would select the titles they wanted up to a quota determined by how much money that library was contributing to the “P.R.A.L.”

“Further, to build up stocks on library shelves, each library would be allowed to choose twice as many books at exchange time as it was obliged to return at the next exchange. In return for this largesse, boards would be required to pay into the P.R.A.L. the amount of the grant they had received from the provincial government for operating purposes, and more if they wished. In return, the branch librarian would select, order and – as P.R.A.L. treasurer – pay for new books for the collection.” (Book Guy, p.45)

1960

A film on library service in northern B.C., *Journey from Zero*, was shot by the National Film Board.

1960s and 70s

In the early sixties, the P.R.A.L. meeting was held alternately in Fort St. John and Dawson Creek. It was conducted in the evening and was strictly a business meeting. The executive also alternated between these two libraries.

Around 1965 it was decided to rotate the P.R.A.L. AGM spring meeting between the member libraries, and the fall meeting was hosted by the Dawson Creek Commission Branch. Around this time the Chairman was elected from any of the member libraries. The position of Vice Chairman was created in 1968.

The purchasing of books through P.R.A.L. was very cost effective for the libraries. During the sixties and early seventies the cost per volume increased, from \$0.83, to \$2.75, to \$3.50, and to \$5.00 (by 1974), but it was still very reasonable.

The major role of Peace River Branch of Public Library Commission, besides distributing processed books, was to provide information on library matters to staff and boards (primarily through workshops at the Spring and Fall P.R.A.L. meetings; the workshops started around 1967).

As of March 1, 1971, the libraries were expected to meet certain minimum standards set by the Public Library Commission. Sometime in this period the Public Library Commission was renamed the Library Development Commission. (It is now known as the Library Services Branch {LSB}).

1988

The Peace River Branch of the Public Library Commission, which was established in 1946 in Dawson Creek to initiate library service in northern B.C., was shut down. Up until this point, book exchanges had continued to take place and books were still centrally bought, processed and distributed to the P.R.A.L. libraries. After the Dawson Creek closure, the Prince George branch did the central buying, processing and distribution of books for P.R.A.L. It also provided library expertise and staff were present to P.R.A.L. meetings.

1989

The future of P.R.A.L. was discussed at the fall meeting. The consensus was that membership was a benefit because P.R.A.L.:

- “acts as a bank for member libraries for their book payments to LSB
- acts as a bank for the annual Legal Services society grant to members
- acts as a bank and liaison between members and the Canada Council *re the Writers In Libraries* program
- provides trustee workshops and continuing education

- acts as an information vehicle between members for problem solving, sharing info, film distribution, etc.
 - acts as the vehicle for regional inter-library borrowing
 - has the capability of bringing a strong lobby voice to governments”
- (Minutes of September 30, 1989)

1995

P.R.A.L. received notification that the Prince George office of the Public Library Commission, which was established in 1931 to initiate library service in the northern central B.C., would be shut down. P.R.A.L. libraries were now on their own regarding the purchasing and processing books. Library expertise was now provided through the Library Services Branch in Victoria (Ministry of Municipal Affairs).

1999

Over the years, the purpose and need for P.R.A.L. has been discussed extensively. At this spring meeting, a number of fundamental decisions were made:

1. To change from two meetings a year to one.
2. To charge an annual membership fee of \$200 per library per year.
3. Revised Mandate: “That the purpose of P.R.A.L. is to coordinate and enhance the sharing of ideas and education concerning libraries in the Peace River Area.”

The benefits of P.R.A.L., as discussed in 1989, have changed somewhat. P.R.A.L. is no longer a bank for book payments to LSB or for the annual Legal Services Society grant, but it does provide interest-free loans of up to \$10,000 for six months. Inter-library borrowing is now done on a provincial basis, versus a regional one. However, all the other benefits are still relevant.

P.R.A.L. Members (and when they became Public Library Associations)

Tomslake:	1945 (withdrew from P.R.A.L. in 1970 and 1971)
Dawson Creek	1946
Fort St. John:	1950
Pouce Coupe	1951
Cassiar:	1960 (closed in 1992 or 1993)
Chetwynd:	1966
Hudson’s Hope:	1966
Fort Nelson:	1973
Tumbler Ridge:	1987

History compiled by: Mariann Field Hill (April, 2002)

Sources: Howard Overend, *Book Guy* (Victoria, B.C.: TouchWood Editons, 2001)
 Anita McWilliams, History of P.R.A.L. report, given in 1974
 P.R.A.L. Reports and Minutes

HISTORY OF NORTH EAST LIBRARY FEDERATION (N.E.L.F.)

2004

At PRAL's June meeting a discussion was held on the future of PRAL and the possibility of a Federation. It was decided that we would invite the Library Services Director to our next AGM for more information. A seed was planted, the idea of a federation was born and at the October meeting a feasibility study was launched to explore the possibilities.

2005

At the September meeting of PRAL it was decided that the Federation would be a good move. A consultant was hired to *"lead us in a session to develop a service plan and help us to determine if we want to proceed with Federation plans"*. A motion was passed *"that executive and representatives remain in office until a decision is made regarding a change from Association to Federation"*. (both quotes from Minutes of September, 2005)

In October we had a two day workshop in Fort St. John with the consultant where we decided to proceed with forming a Federation. During this workshop we chose our new name the North East Library Federation also referred to as NELF and developed a Mission Statement and Service Plan.

The libraries that chose to become a part of this Federation were:

- Chetwynd Public Library
- Hudson's Hope Public Library
- Fort Nelson Public Library
- Fort St. John Public Library
- Pouce Coupe Municipal Library
- Taylor Public Library
- Tumbler Ridge Public Library

2006

At the February meeting a committee was formed to prepare the Service Plan and Budget as well as draft what we then called a constitution but in reality became an agreement between ourselves and the Minister of Education.

We met in Tumbler Ridge in November and spent several hours reviewing the first draft agreement. A deadline was set for the next draft for early 2007.

2007

Corrections were made to the agreement at the March meeting and in July the signed agreement along with the service plan and budget were submitted to the Minister. A letter was received from the Minister in September approving the agreement and the Federation was born.

In October the final PRAL meeting was held where all bank accounts, unfinished business and assets of PRAL were transferred to NELF. This meeting was followed by the first NELF AGM where a new executive was elected and following this meeting was the first regular meeting of NELF.

2008

A committee was formed to hire a manager under contract. The first manager of NELF was hired April 1, 2008. From there the committee worked on policies to be approved at the fall meeting. The Chair with input from the Vice-Chair worked closely with the Manager to begin implementing solutions to the various needs of the participating libraries.

History compiled by: Valerie Bashforth (September 2008)